



History of the SACP

The leading political institutions of South Africa in 2014 - those that form the National Democratic Revolutionary Alliance - all have their origins in the second decade of the 20th Century, around a hundred years ago. The earliest of these was the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), established in 1912. The SANNC became the African National Congress (ANC) in 1923.

The second was the International Socialist League (ISL), established in 1915. The third was the Industrial Workers of Africa, a black workers' union established by the ISL in 1917.

The Industrial Workers of Africa was overtaken by the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, established in 1919, which also received communist support. In the 1940s, the Congress of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) was founded, in the 1950s SACTU, and in the 1980s, COSATU, all with communist support.

The ISL was the main component of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), formalised as such in 1921. After it was banned in 1950, the CPSA became the South African Communist

Party (SACP).

The ANC received communist support throughout, and this support was returned. When the CPSA was banned in 1950, the ANC protested on the first Freedom Day, June 26th of that year, and later with the Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign that began in 1952.

One history

The history of the CPSA and its successor the SACP is woven together, from the beginning, with the history of the liberation movement, and with the history of the trade union movement, of which the biggest component is presently the COSATU federation. The history of the Party cannot be told separately, without reference to these other two.

Nor can this history be separated from the history of the world in a century of great wars, of the appearance of capitalist Imperialism, and of the October, 1917 Russian Revolution, which changed everything, but which also arose out of the same global circumstances.

These global circumstances included the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, and the first wave of capitalist Imperialism of which that war was a major part. The circumstances included the subsequent outbreak of intra-Imperialist conflict over the entire globe, known as the First World War, of 1914-18.

The First World War began with the betrayal of the Second Workers' International by its components in Britain, Germany and France, who agreed to fight and to produce for their bourgeois governments. Without this betrayal, the war was not

going to be possible. Those who did not sell out in this way in 1914 included V I Lenin and the Bolsheviks; Rosa Luxemburg and the Spartacists; and our South African International Socialist League, the ISL.

In April 1917 at the Finland Station in Petrograd, Lenin proposed, among other things, the formation of a new International, which would demand that its affiliates were fully communist. This became the Communist, or Third, International, also known as the Comintern, founded in 1919. Within two years of its founding, in 1921, the Communist Party of South Africa, based on the ISL, was admitted to Comintern membership.

Time Line

The attached document is a “time line”, or list of events, with dates given, and very brief remarks. It is partly derived from “The Red Flag”, a popular history of the Party compiled around 1990, after the unbanning. Other sources are also listed in the document, which is designed for printing on A4, back to back, and not as is usual with the CU, as a booklet.

An earlier version of this document, in a different format again, and containing detailed references, is also attached.

Summary

The 1920s were marked by the decisive turn to the “Black Republic Thesis”, strongly influenced by the Comintern. The 1930s were marked by sectarianism, and then by the escape from sectarianism. In the 1940s, according to the book “The Red Flag”, the CPSA was larger than the ANC. The African Miners’ Strike of 1946 changed everything. So did the election of the National Party to power, two years later.

In the 1950s the ANC took off, and one of the reasons was the strong involvement of the communists, whose own party had been banned. The ANC spoke to the world from the 1950s onwards, and it continued to do so after the banning of the ANC that came ten years after the banning of the Party, following the Sharpeville massacre of 1960.

It is necessary to see South African history together with that of the continent. There was never a lull. Extraordinary things happened, throughout.

The liberation struggle pushed onwards through the 1960s, 70s and eighties until at last in February, 1990, the unbanning of both organisations occurred.

Our timeline document goes up to 1994. Since then, the Party and the ANC have both grown and are now organised across the entire country. COSATU has also grown, but at a slower rate. The Womens' Movement as such has not grown. The rendering of the country into an organised, democratic mass is therefore proceeding, but in an uneven way.

This is not a full history of the Party. It may be sufficient for the purposes of Induction, so that comrades have an idea of the outline of our history. But you need to read more of it, and in more detail.

The struggle continues.

- **The above is to introduce an original reading-text: History of the SACP, [version 1](#), [and 2](#).**
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